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ABSTRACT

To meet the needs of students reading below their potentials, teachers must learn more about the reading process, become more diagnostic in determining pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and couple their knowledge of reading with an understanding of pupil deficiencies to plan a program to improve the child's ability to read. Diagnosis, though important, cannot consume most of the teacher's time. At the beginning of the year the teacher may ascertain a child's instructional reading level by consulting school records and by administering informal reading inventories and teacher-made exercises. Further, the child's basic area of weakness should be assessed, though his strong skills should be utilized in improving weak areas. During ensuing learning experiences notations about the pupil's reading performance should be made, perhaps on 3x5 cards for periodic summary on a profile card. Teachers hesitant about full commitment to complete individualization can increase the flexibility of their instruction by offering a considerable number of independent activities for the majority of the class, freeing themselves to work with smaller groups. All pupils deserve opportunities to spend time in reading widely--regardless of their reading proficiency. (Author/RD)

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A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO CORRECTIVE READING IN THE CLASSROOM

Presented at the Session, "Corrective Reading in the Elementary Classroom" 10:30-11:30 AM, Friday, May 12, 1972, Seventeenth Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.

Today's teachers find it is not enough to divide the class into three groups and assign each a basal textbook "to be covered". Emphasis must be placed upon the needs and learning modes of the individuals within the classroom. If teachers are to meet the reading needs, particularly of those students who read below their potential, it is necessary that they (1) become more knowledgeable concerning the nature of the reading process, (2) become more diagnostic in their approach to determining the pupil's strengths and weaknesses, and (3) use their knowledge of reading coupled with their understanding of the pupil's deficiencies to plan a program that will provide for improvement of the child's ability to read.

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No school district possesses sufficient funds to hire trained reading specialists to care for the needs of all pupils who are reading below potential. It has been, and always will be, the responsibility of the classroom teacher to assume the major role for teaching reading skills. As the core person, she must have at her command the help of a variety of specialists to compliment her own background. But, more important than this, is the fact that the teacher needs to be thoroughly trained in the teaching of reading skills. At the present time this means that many on-the-job teachers must reassess their own knowledge of reading and with the help of district resources find means by which they can upgrade their skills. While this is an important point, it is one I will not dwell on here.

Our main purpose is to discuss how the classroom teacher can use diagnostic skills as a means of improving the reading skills of those youngsters who are not reading up to their potential. It is important to remember that while we use a diagnostic approach, we cannot spend the majority of time in diagnosis. Diagnosis must become a concomitant skill to be used to determine present and future teaching plans.

Getting started in such a program often proves troublesome to teachers. Where does one start? What does one look for?

Most schools keep records on each pupil that are available to teachers. At the beginning of the school year, by using test scores, previous teacher's comments, and other available reading records, it is usually possible for a teacher to ascertain the range of a particular group and the relative standing of each

member within the group. During the first few weeks of school, by means of group informal reading inventories, teacher made exercises, and individual informal reading inventories, the teacher should be able to develop a fairly good idea as to the instructional level of each child in the room.

Using all the information available to her, the teacher should then begin to plan a teaching program. Usually in examining a student's records, the first level of identification should be to determine the student's instructional reading level. Next, the teacher should assess whether the child's basic area of weakness lies in the area of decoding, comprehension, or a combination of factors. Then comes the determination of what specific skills are needed to help this youngster reach his potential. It is at this point that instruction can begin to take place.

As the teacher plans the instructional program, it will be necessary to take into account the pupil's strengths as well as weaknesses. Using areas of strength to provide a basis for reading instruction makes it possible to progress more rapidly in improving those areas of weakness. In this respect, the youngster then is spending time with material that is pleasurable, enjoyable, and readable while receiving instruction in skills that will help him to move on to higher levels of competency. This approach should involve such teaching techniques as providing the pupil with quantities of reading material at his independent and instructional levels. It should also provide materials of interest, use materials to develop his listening

skills, and incorporate knowledge of known skills to introduce unknown skills. Throughout this process the teacher should extend his areas of interest through exploration, reading and discussion.

During the learning experience the teacher should constantly be listening, observing, and making notations about the pupil's reading performance. Through the use of these pupil records, the teacher should then be able to group more accurately. Notations made on a regular basis on 3x5 cards can be summarized periodically and strengths and weaknesses noted on a profile card. Review of such a profile card makes it easier to recognize growth and those areas where improvement is needed. In this way it is possible to individualize instruction on a continuing basis.

Individualized instruction does not mean that all instruction must be on a one-to-one basis. While we are concerned with the individual's growth and development and his interests and ability to read, much of the skill instruction can and should be done through a group approach. Many teachers seem afraid of complete individualization, but are willing to arrange their program providing for greater flexibility. By offering more independent activities for the majority of the group, they are able to concentrate on smaller groups of pupils who need skill help. Small groups may be formed for discussion, development of comprehension skills, review of decoding skills, or instruction in a new skill to raise a pupil's level of independence. The teacher's major responsibility is to recognize those youngsters who are in need of group instruction and provide the opportunity.

As teachers, we can save ourselves much time and energy if we can determine the reading skill needed before we begin. Unfortunately, too much instruction in the classroom is based on short unrelated exercises with little time given to having pupils read widely. Pupils with corrective reading problems are often judged to be skill deficient and are plied with skill exercises. Many individuals do not need instruction in a specific skill in isolation, but do need help in applying these skills to the material being read. Therefore, before assigning group drill work, the teacher must check to see if the pupil knows the skill in isolation or needs help in application. Even after the skills have been taught, there comes the process of helping the student utilize these skills as a means of becoming more independent in his reading activities. We often forget the goal of reading in our search for isolated skills.

In an editorial by Nicolas H. Charney, "Teaching People to Learn," in the February 5, 1972 issue of the SATURDAY REVIEW, he indicates that many educators subscribe to the attitude that, "...True learning and satisfaction come from working hard and enduring pain. It is against the nature of man to want to learn; thus, he must be forced to do so. One has to suffer to be educated." This attitude is extremely prevalent when it comes to a student having difficulty in any subject. From the earliest stages of reading, all pupils should be given sufficient time within the school day to read all types of material for sufficient lengths of time. The below level reader often suffers from this deficiency more than other youngsters. Just the

other day a teacher told me that only her two top groups were permitted to read widely in the classroom library as a special privilege. This privilege is one to be extended to all youngsters regardless of their reading ability. It is necessary to teach the basic skills of reading, but we must also ensure that there is time for the pupil to use these skills. Thus, it is even more important for the child reading below potential to be given much opportunity to utilize known skills in a variety of ways, to motivate the child to want to read, and to make reading a pleasurable activity.

In summary, it is important that through careful diagnosis and good teaching, we provide a well-rounded program for pupils reading below potential. Such a program should provide opportunities to reteach unknown skills, give practice to utilize known skills, and offer unlimited opportunities to read widely within areas of interest.